The universal essential elements outline the knowledge, skills and attributes required for working with children from birth to five years of age and their families. They bring together the essential elements within and across the disciplines that are required for working within the early years environment. These elements extend across all disciplinary areas of professions in the early years and across all levels of education provision from AQF 2-9. This is the third of four resources that together form the Interdisciplinary educational framework for professionals working with children in the early years.

The following universal essential elements were developed as part of an Australian Government, Office for Learning & Teaching Innovation and Development Grant in 2015-2016 (see http://www.flinders.edu.au/mnhs/early-years/). The universal essential elements were identified via (i) a rigorous and comprehensive review of professional guidelines; (ii) experiential evidence gathered via focus groups with professionals, workers and families; (iii) online surveys of professionals, workers and families; and (iv) contextual evidence provided by research partners and members of an expert advisory group. The universal essential elements for working with children from birth to five years of age are presented in 17 domains.

A. Universal essential knowledge and skills
The essential knowledge and skills that all people who work with children aged from birth to 5 years would be expected to develop for practice are:

1. Children
   People who work with children will:
   1.1 Demonstrate knowledge of relevant aspects of child physical, social, emotional, cognitive and communication development.
   1.2 Demonstrate attunement to typical child development, including normal variances, and atypical development.
   1.3 Incorporate philosophies that view young children as capable, competent, curious and creative and as actively involved in play and learning, making decisions, negotiating, participating and contributing.
   1.4 Demonstrate knowledge of children’s individual capabilities and characteristics including gender, age, health, socioeconomic status and networks.
   1.5 Demonstrate knowledge of children’s varying abilities, skills and interests.
   1.6 Demonstrate holistic knowledge of children’s diverse social, economic, cultural, ethnic, religious/spiritual, values, traditions and backgrounds.

2. Family
   People who work with children will:
   2.1 Acknowledge and respect the uniqueness of each family, and recognise the need to engage with each family differently.
   2.2 Respect the special relationship between children and their families.
   2.3 Learn about the culture, structure, lifestyles, customs, language, beliefs and kinship systems of each family.
   2.4 Recognise and respect the different roles of family members and facilitate their involvement where appropriate.

3. Community
   People who work with children will:
   3.1 Learn about and have sensitivity towards the needs of the community(s) served, particularly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians and those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.
   3.2 Learn about and value community and cultural obligations and responsibilities, including those of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, and take these into account in the making of decisions.
   3.3 Learn about the communities that they work within and enact programs which are responsive to those contexts and community priorities.
   3.4 Create opportunities to enable community participation and strengthen community engagement.

4. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture
   People who work with children will:
   4.1 Apply knowledge of, respect and understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and languages as they relate to the developing child.
   4.2 Engage and interact meaningfully and safely with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.
   4.3 Promote reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.
   4.4 Respect the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians as the traditional custodians of the land, who live a distinct and viable culture that shapes their world view and influences their daily decision making.

5. Child safe practice
   People who work with children will:
   5.1 Acknowledge that the protection and wellbeing of children is paramount.
   5.2 Accord to children the protection due to them as rights holders under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.
   5.3 Recognise and respond to children who may be or are in circumstances that make them vulnerable to harm.
   5.4 Apply organisational codes of conduct for child safe practices.
   5.5 Create and maintain safe, child-centred, supportive and healthy environments, spaces and places.

6. Communication and collaboration
   People who work with children will:
   6.1 Apply knowledge of collaborative practices when working with children, families and colleagues across disciplines and services.
   6.2 Collaboratively assess, plan, implement and evaluate to achieve goals and outcomes for children.
   6.3 Build working partnerships and positive relationships based on respect, openness, mutual trust and open communication.
   6.4 Communicate clearly, openly, respectfully and honestly with children and families.
   6.5 Demonstrate empathy and understanding in working with people from a diverse range of backgrounds.
   6.6 Act upon cultural and communication differences and preferences that may affect understandings by providing communication alternatives.
   6.7 Be responsible for setting clear boundaries in all forms of communication, and recognise appropriate limits of professional relationships.

7. Leadership
   People who work with children will:
   7.1 Use leadership skills in everyday practice to facilitate optimal outcomes for children.
   7.2 Advocate, where appropriate, in professional and community networks to improve outcomes for children.
   7.3 When working in a leadership capacity, manage and develop team members effectively and kindly.
   7.4 Represent the needs of children to ensure high standards of practice.
8. Legislation and other guidelines
People who work with children will:
8.1 Be familiar with and practice in accordance with jurisdictional legislation, regulations, policies and procedures, professional codes, standards, and guidelines that are relevant to their employment (e.g. child protection, anti-discrimination, privacy, freedom of information, ethics, records storage, data management, consumer protection, and work health and safety).
8.2 Make decisions fairly, impartially and promptly, considering all relevant information, legislation, policies, regulations, professional codes and procedures.
8.3 Report breaches of relevant jurisdictional legislation, policies, regulations, professional codes and procedures (e.g. reasonable suspicion that a child has or is suffering sexual abuse, neglect or non-accidental injury, and reporting such inappropriate actions involving children whether inside or outside the service).
8.4 Inform people of their rights and work to ensure people can exercise these.

9. Work practice and service delivery
People who work with children will:
9.1 Value and enjoy working with children.
9.2 Be aware of and work within the scope of their knowledge and skills, and refer to others where appropriate.
9.3 Gain appropriate credentials for practice in their respective discipline(s).
9.4 Engage in child-centred service provision.
9.5 Demonstrate high levels of professional conduct.
9.6 Be able to justify practice within legal, professional, ethical and reflective frameworks.
9.7 Critically reflect on their own attitudes, knowledge and skills, and work to address limitations to practice.
9.8 Be committed to continuing professional development and lifelong learning.
9.9 Develop and use a variety of appropriate resources and materials to purposefully and meaningfully engage individuals and groups, including those from diverse backgrounds.
9.10 Foster supportive and constructive relationships with colleagues, teams and external partners.
9.11 Use interdisciplinary approaches drawing on expertise of all team members.
9.12 Develop an understanding and appreciation of the responsibilities, capacities, constraints and ethical codes of other professions.
9.13 Generate and manage information with integrity so that records/documents are accurate, logical, legible, clear, concise and timely.
9.14 Appropriately use ICT, including social media, and report any inappropriate usage.
9.15 Advocate to reduce the adverse effects that power imbalances and prejudicial attitudes and practices have on social and institutional justice.
9.16 Ensure that their practice venue offers privacy, confidentiality, suitable access and is safe and secure.
9.17 Ensure that grounds, premises and equipment are safe.
9.18 Respect the environment and practice in a sustainable manner.

10. Ethical practice
People who work with children will:
10.1 Observe and practise the principles of ethical conduct.
10.2 Speak out and/or take action in the presence of unethical practice.
10.3 Practice in a culturally competent and safe manner and seek feedback on the cultural safety of the children for whom they care.
10.4 Respect the privacy and confidentiality of information.
10.5 Seek advice if facing difficult ethical situations or dilemmas.
10.6 Recognise, declare, and manage conflicts of interest.

11. Research to inform practice
People who work with children will:
11.1 Use rigorous and relevant research to contribute to practice improvement and the development of new policies and approaches.
11.2 Apply critical thinking and analysis to the selection and use of theories and research for practice.
11.3 Where appropriate demonstrate knowledge and skills in undertaking research including: literature review; proposal development; writing; undertaking ethics applications; data collection, analysis and knowledge translation; and evaluation.
11.4 Communicate the results of research or other professional advancements in a professional manner to colleagues and to research participants where applicable.
11.5 Ensure that any research conducted with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians is based on established Indigenous research protocols.

12. Dignity and trust
People who work with children will:
12.1 Act with dignity at all times.
12.2 Promote public confidence in those who work with children.
12.3 Uphold the intrinsic worth of themselves and all persons with whom they interact.
12.4 Practice with kindness, courtesy, flexibility, patience, care and compassion.
12.5 Be trustworthy.
12.6 Recognise and preserve the trust and privilege inherent in the relationships they form with children, their families and wider communities.

13. Diversity
People who work with children will:
13.1 Acknowledge, value, and accept diversity, and recognise their own cultural similarities to and differences from others.
13.2 Respond respectfully and sensitively towards diversity and the uniqueness of others.
13.3 Uphold and comply with non-discriminatory practices, and anti-discrimination laws and policies.
13.4 Take action if they know or suspect discrimination or harassment in the workplace.
13.5 Recognise and negotiate power differentials and imbalances in everyday interactions with children, families and others.

14. Equity
People who work with children will:
14.1 Recognise the equal worth of all persons in accordance with international human rights treaties.
14.2 Strive to achieve equity in access to care and services.
14.3 Promote policies, practices and social conditions that uphold human rights and that seek to ensure access, equity, inclusion and legal protection for all.

15. Justice and integrity
People who work with children will:
15.1 Uphold the principles of justice.
15.2 Be fair and reasonable.
15.3 Oppose prejudice, injustice and dishonesty in the treatment of children, families and communities.
15.4 Recognise they and others have rights as well as responsibilities.
15.5 Act with integrity, impartiality, truthfulness and honesty.

16. Respect and privacy
People who work with children will:
16.1 Respect culture, views, preferences, decisions and wishes that are alternate to your own, provided that the wellbeing of the child is paramount.
16.2 Respect the essential humanity, dignity and intrinsic worth of themselves and others.
16.3 Express their own views in a respectful manner.
16.4 Seek to resolve conflicts respectfully.
16.5 Respect colleagues and other practitioners’ knowledge, experience, expertise and insights.
16.6 Elicit permission from children and families to share their information with others in accordance with legislation and other guidelines.

17. Rights
People who work with children will:
17.1 Recognise, respect, promote, protect and uphold human rights, including the rights of children.
17.2 Honour every child’s right to play.
17.3 Respect the right of children and families to choose, refuse or withdraw from services without comment or penalty; unless immediate or life threatening harm may be the result to a child.
17.4 Recommend changes to policies, procedures and guidelines when children’s rights are compromised.